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A DAY

IN THE

LIFE OF A WORKER

1952

[Frontispiece]

[pp. 1-2 contain no textual material]

361 Ferenc Gergely, an iron worker, is a resident of Budapest. He lives in the XIIIth district of the Hungarian capital, at No. 1 Peace Avenue. Not quite a decade ago, this part of the city was just a sorely neglected suburb. Ferenc Gergely himself was hardly able to keep body and soul together when he moved here sometime during the years between the two world wars. He remembers it very vividly: His entire wealth, everything portable which belonged to him, found ample room in the small hand-cart he and his wife pulled along the shabby suburban streets.

Much has changed since then. Ferenc Gergely's life has changed, and so have the lives of hundreds of thousands of his fellow workers; the face of this onetime shabby suburb has changed, and so has the face of the entire town, the entire country.

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Ferenc Gergely, lathe operator.

Instead of their former crowded and dirty subleased room, Ferenc Gergely and his family now occupy a modern two-room apartment in one of the workers' apartment houses recently built on Peace Avenue. The rooms are large and bright, the kitchen roomy and attractive, the bathroom tiled and sparklingly clean. There is a pantry and a nice little foyer, central heating in the winter and

362 hot water all through the year. Three days wages pay for the monthly rent and not quite two days wages for the heating and hot water.

From the balcony of the apartment you can look along the whole street, which, only a short while ago, was a sorry sight with its empty lots and wartorn, crumbling buildings. The ruins and scrap-iron yards have been cleared away, and today beautiful new apartment buildings stand in their place, proclaiming that Ferenc Gergely and his Hungarian fellow workers have rebuilt their houses, their towns, their fatherland.

361 The broken cobble-stones have disappeared, and, comfortable busses coast along the smooth, asphalt road. In the evenings the streets are alight with electric arc-lamps

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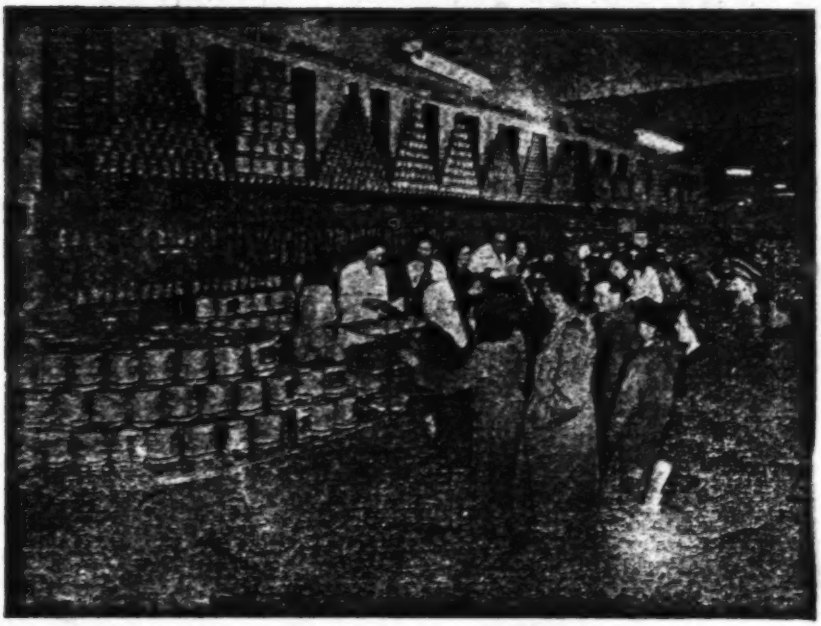
The living room of Ferenc Gergely's two-room apartment.



A wide variety of foods is available at the state store which is open day and night. This is where Mrs. Gergely does her shopping.

which have taken the place[7] of the old, dim gas lamps. In the past a miserable grocer eking out a dreary existence in a dark basement shop and a smoke-filled pub represented commercial life in the street; today brand-new stores with brilliant show-windows line the street, and the housewives can do all their shopping within a range of two hundred yards. The new district clinic of the social security institute under the management of the trade unions was recently opened in the next street, and the entire next block is taken up by the new school. There are two movies just around the corner, and the nearest theater is not more than ten minutes from there. The district inhabited by the Gergely family and twenty to thirty thousand other Hungarian families is no longer one of which the capital need be ashamed but has become one of its flourishing, lively, healthy quarters.

And, to come back to the Gergely family, if they should

[7] [i.e. in District XIII, Budapest --- Analyst]

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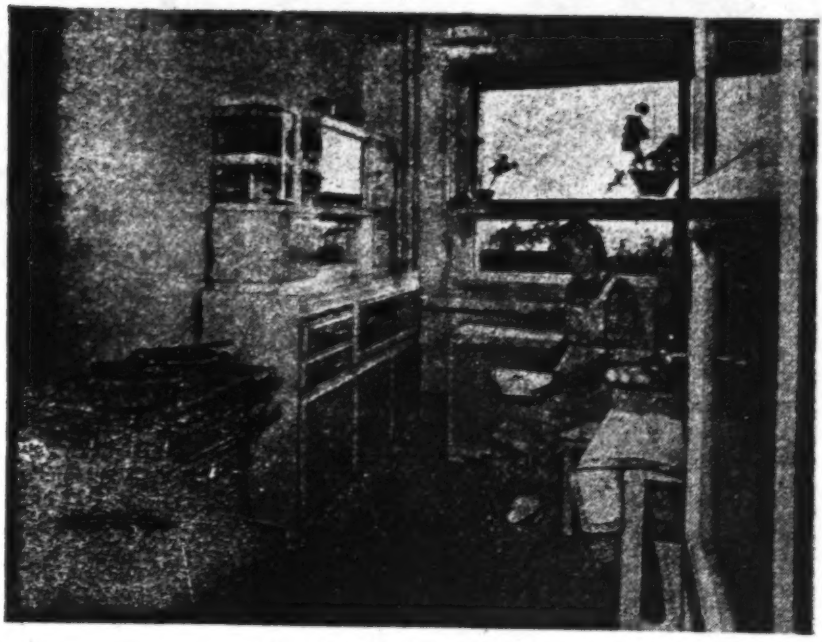
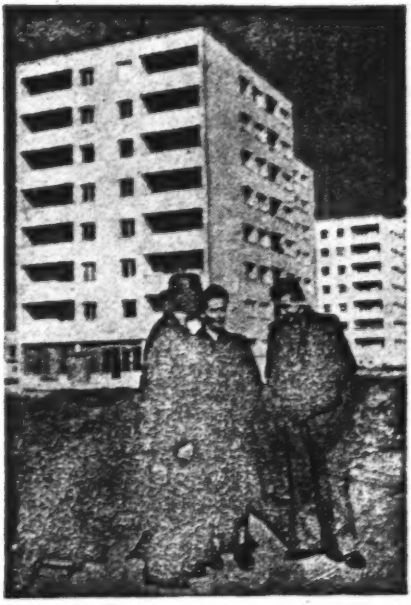


Mrs. Gergely in her kitchen.

352 And, to come back to the Gergely family, if they should
511 decide one day to move, even a large moving van would prove too small to transport all their belongings. There is the furniture of the two rooms, the kitchen furniture, a sewing machine, a radio, plenty of household utensils and crockery, curtains, carpets, pictures and books and the two children's things. Ferenc Gergely smiles, thinking of the many things he has purchased in the course of the last four to five years. He remembers the days when he had but one shirt and had to wait, shirtless, while his wife laundered it. Today the cupboards are full of clothes, underwear and linen.

000 The smile lighting up Ferenc Gergely's face whenever he remembers these things is not merely one of serene satisfaction. There is a shade of self-consciousness in it and a shade of militant pride because all this was not so easy to achieve. None of it fell, like a gift, into his

lap; none of it was given for nothing; none of it was obtained quickly, from one day to the next. He had to fight for this kind of life; it demanded self-discipline, hard work and a determined struggle against obstacles and difficulties.



This is No. 1 Peace Avenue, where Mr. Gergely has his apartment.

What he had to do, however, he did not have to do alone but together with the others, with the entire country. Like the exciting scenes of a film drama, across his mind race the various incidents in the history of this small nation since its liberation.

When the roar of the guns subsided and the people of Budapest came crawling out of the cellars, the first task was to clear away the ruins, the marks of the devastation caused by the war. Then they could begin reconstruction. They had to rebuild ruined factories, plants, machines, replace losses —the Nazis had taken away everything that was movable — produce coal, iron, raw materials; start transportation; produce, work and struggle against the enemy, who did their best to bring back the past, the oppression of the working class, and the wealth acquired without work by the privileged few.

Ferenc Gergely's face darkens when he remembers the terrible chaos of inflation, when the wages received for a week of hard work scarcely paid for two pounds of sauerkraut. The horse-dealers, stock exchange sharks, black marketeers and speculators lived like kings and spent their

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Sunday morning at home.

458 gold in expensive restaurants and nightclubs. The mag-
435 nates, the landlords, the fascist army officers, allied to all kinds of traitors of the working class movement, were conspiring and organizing underground to prevent the working people from rebuilding the country for themselves, for their own prosperity.

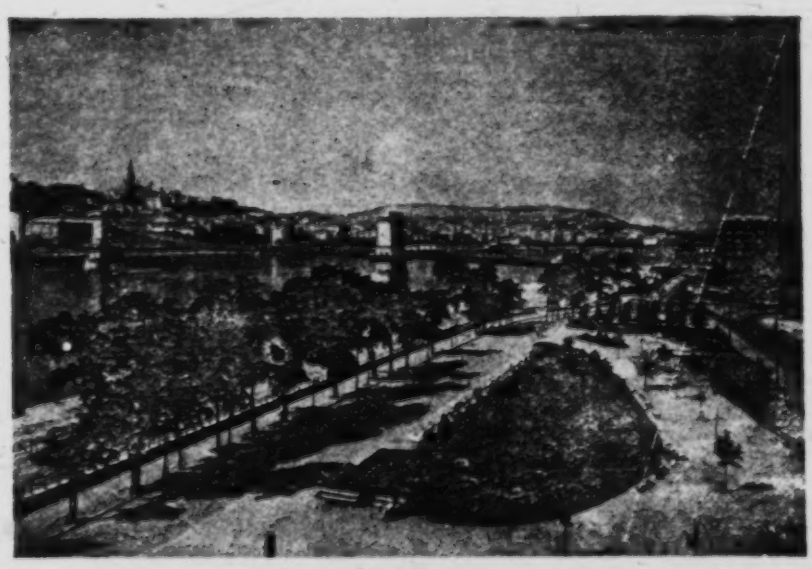
000 But they could not turn history back. The Hungarian working class was vigilant and strong, determined and untiring. Its fist was quicker and harder! Its persistance and heroic effort was crowned with success. The three year plan of reconstruction was achieved ahead of time (1947-49), and this permitted the launching of a plan on an even larger scale, the plan to build an entirely new Hungary. The Five Year Plan is the pride of the millions of Hungarians.

[327] Ferenc Gergely, together with thousands of his fellow
461 workers, works on Csepel Island in Budapest, in the largest industrial plant of the country. He is no stakhanovite, not even a decorated worker. Only the best, the most

outstanding workers are decorated, and he is only a good worker, one of the hundreds of thousands of honest, diligent workers of average skill. Naturally he, too, is spurred by ambition; he, too, is trying to outdo the others in good work; he, too, is studying, advancing and bettering himself. 461

The first shift at the factory[1] starts work at seven in the morning. In the past Ferenc Gergely had to get up at four in the morning every single day because it took him two and a half hours to reach his place of work by streetcars, changing three or four times. Today, with the Csepel express train he reaches the factory in thirty to thirty-five minutes, which means that he can sleep two hours longer, and he saves the same amount of time on the way home. Two hours more are left for recreation, for reading, for the family. [466] 489

On the way home Ferenc Gergely often considers the



The Danube Embankment which was demolished during the war, now completely reconstructed.

[1] i.e. the Csepel ironworks[2] -- Analyst]

489 extent to which transportation in Budapest and the entire country has developed since the liberation. During the war 70 per cent of the locomotives, 85 per cent of the freight and passenger cars and 90 per cent of the bridges were destroyed. Except for a few dozen broken-down streetcars and busses there were no vehicles of transportation left in Budapest. And today, over a period of three months, the new transportation system carries over 50 million passengers. And on the Danube, between Buda and Pest, the seventh bridge is now under construction.

466 Before entering the workshop to take his place at the work bench, Ferenc Gergely changes his clothes. Long rows of lockers stand along the walls of the large bright room furnished with tables, chairs, benches and mirrors. From the locker room you enter the washrooms and shower rooms. Everyone has the kind of work clothes required for his work. Those who work at workbenches wear overalls; those who work with fire or corrosive materials wear leather overalls and leather aprons or, if necessary, rubber overalls, rubber boots, protective helmets, gloves, goggles. If the work done is especially hard on clothes, the factory provides the worker with clothes free of charge and as often as necessary. The factory provides the various protective clothes and appliances free of charge.

Ferenc Gergely in the factory washroom.

The workshop in which Ferenc Gergely works is very different from the old, unhealthy, airless, dark and dirty workshops he was used to in the past. This is a huge,

light, airy workroom, orderly and very clean. Since the liberation 90 per cent of the old machines[1] have been replaced, and instead of the obsolete, noisy machines the workers run efficient, up to date machines of a new make provided with protective devices. 466 [178]

Ferenc Gérgely and his fellow workers are almost without exception enthusiastic supporters of the movement which provides that workers working on the same machine, including the workers of the various shifts, are jointly responsible for the maintenance, cleaning and expert handling of the machine. This movement is called "the socialist protection of the machines." One can work faster and more easily on a carefully tended machine, which means that one can also earn more. The machines, the tools, the factory no longer belong to big business but to the state of the working people. The workers know this, and that is why they handle them so carefully.

Ferenc Gergely works easily and quickly. He is helped not only by the machine but by many other factors aiding and inspiring him. First of all, he always knows exactly what he has to do. The days are past when the foreman simply assigned him a case of round iron to cut in screw threads and returned half an hour later to tell him to put it aside, giving him something more urgent to do.

In the past senseless bustle and unsystematic management prevailed; now Ferenc Gergely and his fellow workers do their work according to exact plans made in advance. The workshop, the factory, all the industry, even the whole country works according to exact, systematic plans. Ferenc Gergely knows that he is producing turning lathes today and that he is to go on for another six or eight weeks or any other length of time producing turning lathes. He knows how many pieces of work he has to finish each day, each week or each month. He knows to a penny how much his earnings will be. He knows that if he can think up a clever trick, a good idea to make his own work faster and simpler he can earn more. This is not only 461

[1] [in the Csepel Ironworks -- Analyst]

461 because in this way he will produce more but also because a reward is due for every innovation, every rationalization.

466 Naturally the entire atmosphere is different from what it used to be. Selfishness, envy, quarreling, vilification of the good workers and oppression of the weaker have all been eliminated. Before the liberation Ferenc Gergely often got stuck with a difficult piece of work and did not know how to go on with it. Or he suddenly realized that he was working too slowly, that his work did not go as well as he had expected of himself or as others expected of him. He dared not consult the foreman or the engineer for fear that they would fire him as unfit. From his fellow workers he could expect nothing because those who knew what to do guarded their secrets most jealously.

Even today it sometimes occurs to him that he needs guidance or advice. But no sooner has he pronounced the words "comrades, how would you do this . . ." than they are at his side showing him, explaining to him the right way to go about it. Naturally, he does the same whenever he has an opportunity to help others. There is an atmosphere of mutual aid, of collective feeling in the workshop. They are constantly exchanging their experiences, and, if one of them finds a new way of rationalizing, simplifying work, his innovation becomes, by the next day, a common possession. And this is true not only for this workshop but for every workshop of the factory, for every factory of the country because of the close relationships existing among the factories, industries and enterprises of the land.

It often happens that the director visits the workshop during the morning. He stops at the workbenches, converses with the workers, asks for information, gives advice, controls the work. But these are no longer the formal, condenscending visits paid by the capitalist general managers to the otherwise hated and despised workers. Today the relationship between the leaders and the workers is entirely different. The director used to be a worker him-

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Working out a problem with the planning division of the factory.

466 self, he knows Ferenc Gergely and the other workers personally, he is bound to many by old ties of friendship, by memories of common struggles against the capitalists. He became a director because of his outstanding abilities. His organizational ability and his knowledge of the factory are the things to which he owes his rise. Before the liberation he had worked at the plant for many years learning the routine and processes of the works. He is putting this knowledge to good use in his position of director. He has the respect of the workers, who like him and have confidence in his leadership.

Regularly he invites the best and most experienced workers to conferences where they discuss problems and difficulties which arise, seeking, together, the best way out, the best solution. At trade union meetings he sits there, among the workers, and finds it quite natural for them to criticize his work or his attitudes just as freely and sincerely as they do that of the others. He is the director of the factory, but today that means that he is the first worker of the factory, the one who has to do the most responsible work.

Just as he has the right to call to account any worker of the factory and ask him whether he has accomplished the work undertaken according to the contract for the wages provided by collective bargaining, so Ferenc Gergely and his fellow workers have the right to demand that the director provide the necessary conditions of work, adequate machines, tools, sufficient raw material, and healthy working conditions and that he fulfill the social and cultural obligations undertaken in the contract.

At noon Ferenc Gergely dines at the factory refectory. He no longer eats in a corner of the workshop with oily, dirty hands, out of a paper bag as he used to. He sits at a white table—on which there are always a few flowers—in a bright, large room and eats out of porcelain plates comfortably and well. Lunch consists of 2 or 3 dishes; the food is tasty and plentiful. He pays 60 per cent of the price of the food; the rest is paid by the factory. And

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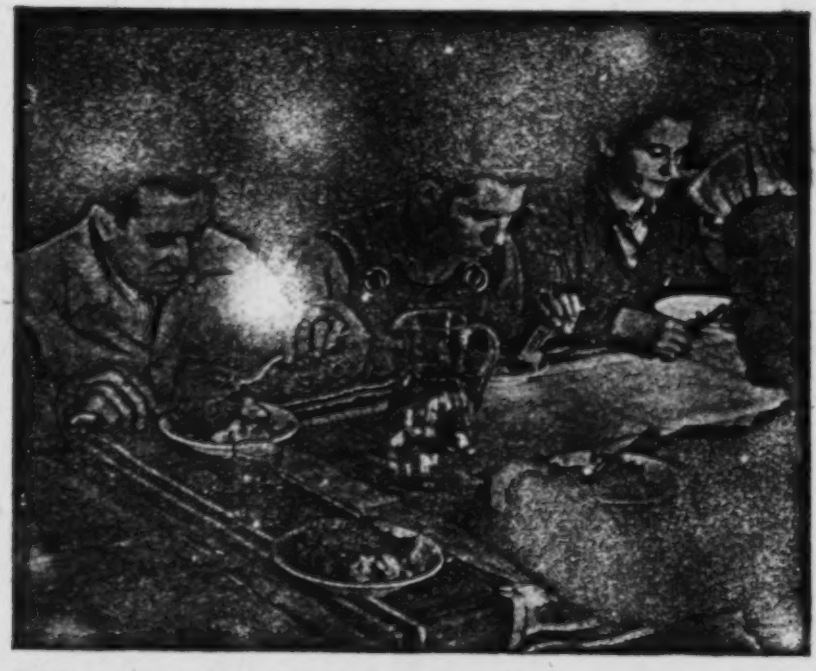

Well prepared meals in pleasant surroundings in the factory dining room.

this 60 per cent is equivalent to the wages he earns in 15 minutes.

After dinner he resumes his work. The shift is soon over; at 3:00 P.M. it is done. He doesn't go home immediately, however, but spends about an hour teaching the new workers. . Some of these are peasant youths who have recently come from the country; others have been doing different work up to now—these are the "re-trainees."

Manpower administration is one of the most important problems of Hungarian industry. The threat of unemployment, of an insecure future, is a thing of the past in Hungary. Today there is a shortage of skilled labor in certain fields of industry. Industrial re-training helps towards the solution of this problem. Every skilled worker of every Hungarian factory considers it his duty to participate in this great educational work, the training of new skilled

464 workers. In the Five Year Plan the country needs 650,000 new workers for the realization of the tasks before it, and part of this tremendous number of workers is being trained by Ferenc Gergely and his fellow workers with affection and patience and the ambition to turn out skilled workers worthy of their masters.

462 Among Ferenc Gergely's apprentices the most skillful is Mrs. Istvan Kincses. She is a diligent and ingenious young woman who came to the capital from the country. For a while she busied herself at home, in her little household, but when she saw that all careers are open to women as well as to men and that no differences are made between men and women as far as work and wages are concerned —she decided to become a skilled worker. She has been [814] working with Ferenc Gergely for almost a year, and four times a week she attends evening classes of the Secondary School for Working People. This new type of school was instituted by the People's Democracy for those who in the past had no opportunity to study and now want to make up for lost time without, however, giving up their work.

Mrs. Kincses will soon be a skilled worker or even a stakhanovite, clever and ambitious as she is. Or a technician or even an engineer if she wins her matriculation certificate at the Workers' School and decides to continue with her studies. Her future is in her own hands. Women are no longer inferior, badly paid workers in Hungary, a kind of "ersatz-manpower," as they used to be in the past. She has the same rights and the same opportunities her male fellow workers have. There are tens of thousands of working women in every branch of industry, in every factory and plant, in transportation, in the offices and in public administration, in the fields of education, arts and sciences, who do their jobs and are paid the same as the men.

562 The people's state takes particular care of its working 745 women. As provided by law, they are entitled to three months maternity leave with full pay, or, should their

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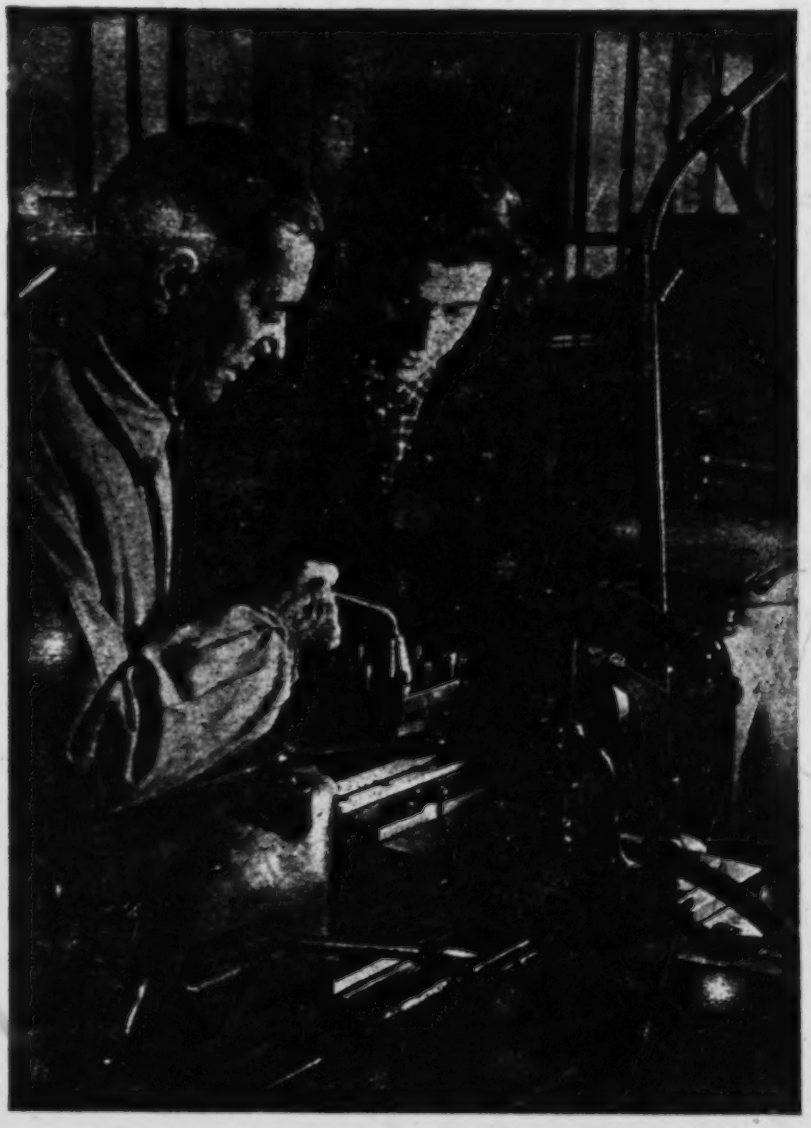

Mr. Gergely shows one of his pupils, Mrs. Kincses, another trick in the operation of a machine.

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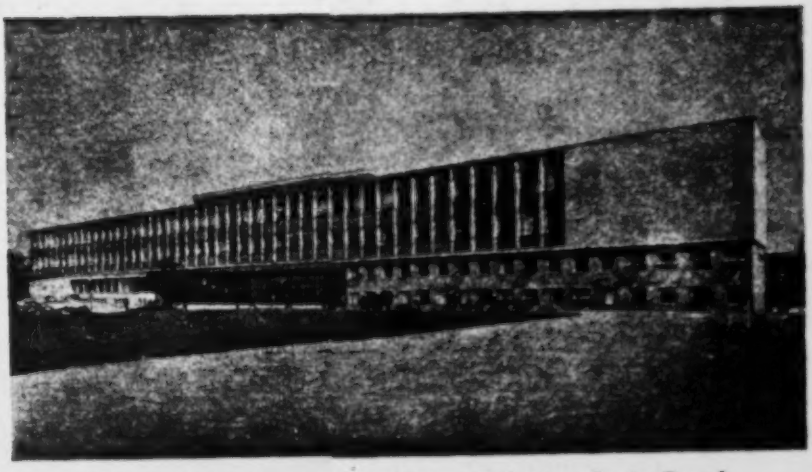

The apprentice home at the Matyas Rakosi works in Csepel.

562 745 condition require it, to more. If she places her child in the factory baby care center, the young mother has the right to go down there and nurse it. This time is included in her eight work hours. Pregnant women may ask to be transferred to lighter work without reduction in wages. Six months before and six months after her delivery a woman cannot be discharged from her work or job. Working women are protected by law from having to do night-work or exhausting overtime.

[466] 475 217 Around four o'clock, when he has finished with the apprentices, Ferenc Gergely leaves the workshop. He goes to the locker room, takes a hot shower and changes into his street clothes. Then he goes to the factory library to return a book. He loves to read, but in the past he had little opportunity to indulge in this pastime. Either he had no time or he had no money. Now he has both although reading costs him nothing since the library provides him with books free of charge. He can read, study, educate himself at his pleasure without having to pay for it. There are approximately twenty-five hundred

factory libraries in the country; these contain more than one million volumes which teach and entertain the workers, acquaint them with the benefits of culture and raise their educational level.

The factory library is on the first floor of the cultural center of the works. On his way up Ferenc Gergely glances into the lecture hall. For a moment he watches the rehearsal of the cultural group of the factory which is competing, with a good chance of winning, in the national cultural competitions now under way. Approximately

Ferenc Gergely in the factory library.

517 six thousand urban and factory cultural groups are participating in the competitions. Eighty-five thousand participants, the overwhelming majority of whom are workers, are members of choirs, dance or dramatic groups.

883 When leaving the cultural center he is almost knocked down by a group of gay young boys, among them one of his apprentices. The young people are on their way to the sports ground of the factory for their football training. The football team of the works is among the best competing for the national championship. The young workers of the factory are great sports fans; many outstanding swimmers, gymnasts, wrestlers and athletes have come from their ranks.

000 On the way home he meets an old friend of his: Janos Toth, one of the fitters of the motorcycle factory. Janos Toth is in a great hurry, his face shines with excitement and pride. Why? Because of his wife . . .

[623] Before the people of the district this afternoon, the District Council is rendering an account of the work accomplished. Everywhere in Hungary, members of the local councils, local organs of public administration, regularly report to the population on the work done, the problems of the day and the tasks of the immediate future. This is how the people of the district exercise direct control over the leaders, and this is how they participate in the work of the Councils. Today it is Janos Toth's wife who makes the report; she is deputy-chairman of the executive committee of the XIII district Council. Mrs. Toth was a weaver at a textile factory in Buda.

562 "Would you ever have believed this possible? . . . " the excited friend asks Ferenc Gergely. And he begins to enumerate the positions won by Hungarian proletarian women who counted for nothing in the past. There is a minister among them—she, too, was a weaver, a deputy minister, a Council chairman, which is equivalent to a mayor, factory directors, attorneys, judges and who knows

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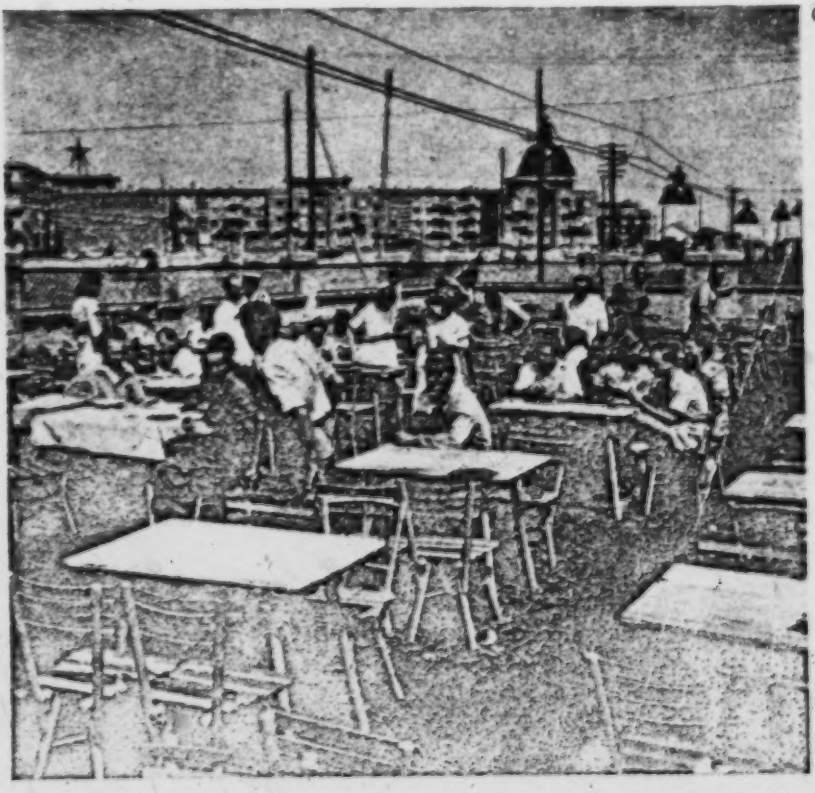
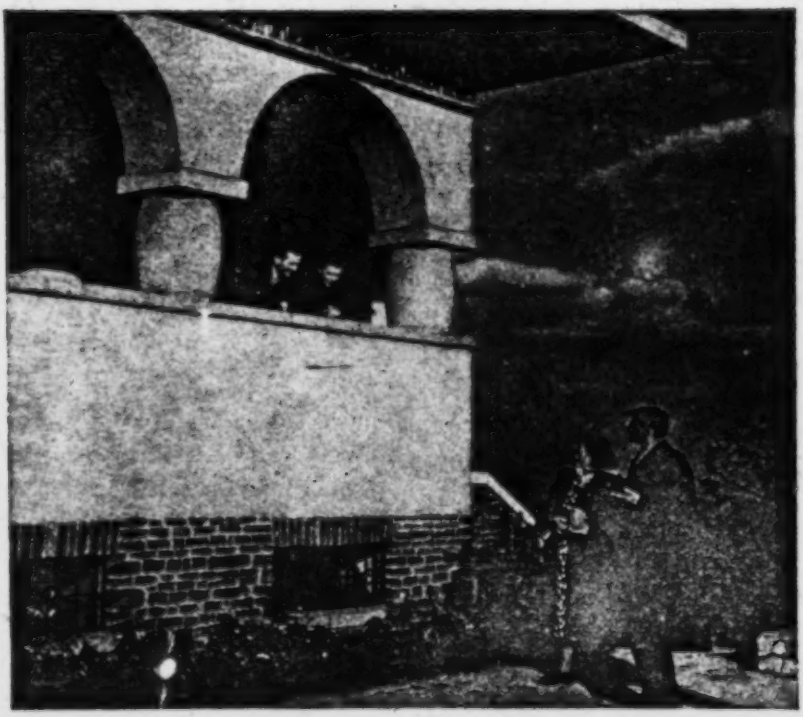
what else. Of the 400 members of Parliament over 70 are women and so are almost one third of the council members.

Arriving at the terminal Ferenc Gergely takes leave of his friend and goes home. At home a guest is waiting for him: his best friend, his son's godfather, Jozsef Magyar, a mason. Jozsef Magyar works in Stalintown on the construction of the Stalin Iron Works, in the new socialist town which is to be larger than Csepel and will offer thirty to thirty-five thousand workers bread and work, security and a peaceful life.



Outdoor dining area in Stalintown, where lunches are served in the summer.



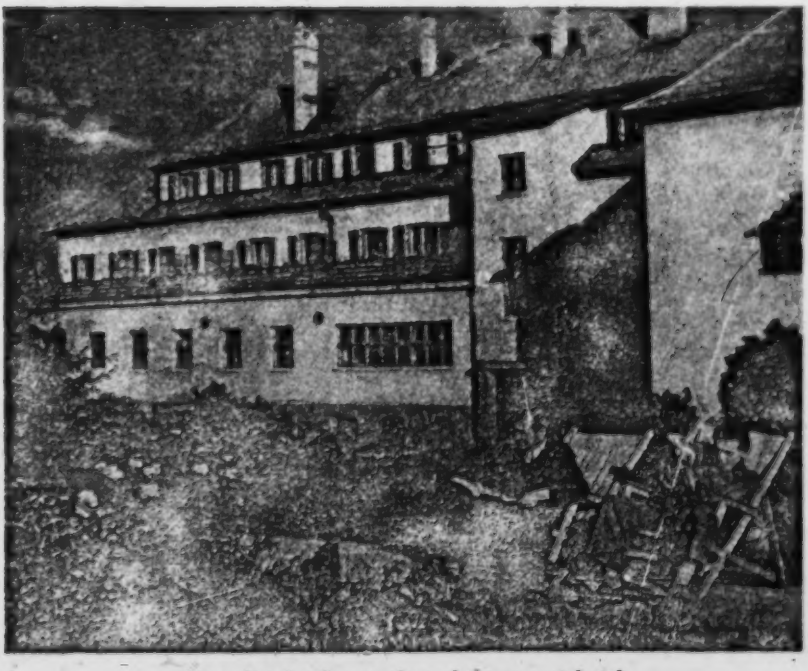
A resort hotel on Mount Libesty.

a peaceful life. Every time Jozsef Magyar comes to Budapest he pays a visit to the Gergelys. He can talk to them for hours about the growth and development of this new industrial town with its factory buildings and apartment houses, new blocks of houses, new streets where, two years ago, there were only swamps and empty fields.

Jozsef Magyar had recently been ill. His old rheumatism began to bother him again, and he had to keep to his bed for almost a month. He got better, but at the medical examination they found that he needed rest and sent him to Heviz, a mud-bath resort near Lake Balaton. Now he had come to say good-bye because he was leaving the next day for a two-week free rest-cure.

They sit and talk as old friends would. They recall that in the past the state paid little attention to the health of the workers. Half of the burden of social security was paid by the workers, but, whenever they wanted to take advantage of the social security services, the authorities always found a way to deprive them of their rightful claims.

In new Hungary everything is changed. Since the trade unions, that is, the workers themselves, direct the work of the social security organization, a number of new, modern hospitals and clinics have been established. Health care has improved, sick benefits increased, the number of accidents lessened; and health statistics show an increasingly

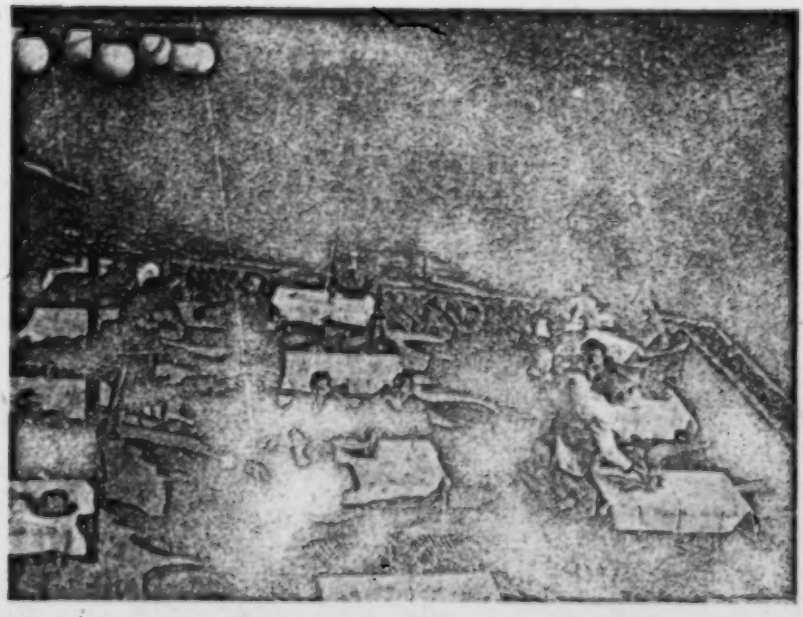


Lounging in the garden of the resort hotel.

encouraging picture. The entire burden of social security is borne by the employer, that is, in most cases by the state. The network of mother and child care institutions is constantly being extended; the number of factory baby care centers and day nurseries increases day by day. As compared to 1938, infant mortality has decreased by one third.

A social security council, composed of workers, functions in every factory. This council sees to it that sanitary precautions are observed and takes care of the sanitary problems of the factory.

The trade unions handle the questions of rest and recreation and help the workers make the best use of their paid



Terrace restaurant of the hotel on Mount Liberty where Ferenc Gergely spent his vacation.

One of the many factory resorts along the Danube.

vacations. Over 250,000 Hungarian workers take advantage of vacation benefits, which means that they pay only 20 per cent of the cost, the rest being paid by the state. Stakhanovites and outstanding workers, industrial apprentices and young workers as well as children enjoy the holiday resorts entirely free of charge. Everybody goes to the resort best suited to his condition, to beautiful resorts along Lake Balaton in the mountains, to luxurious hotels which, in the past, opened their doors exclusively to the privileged classes.

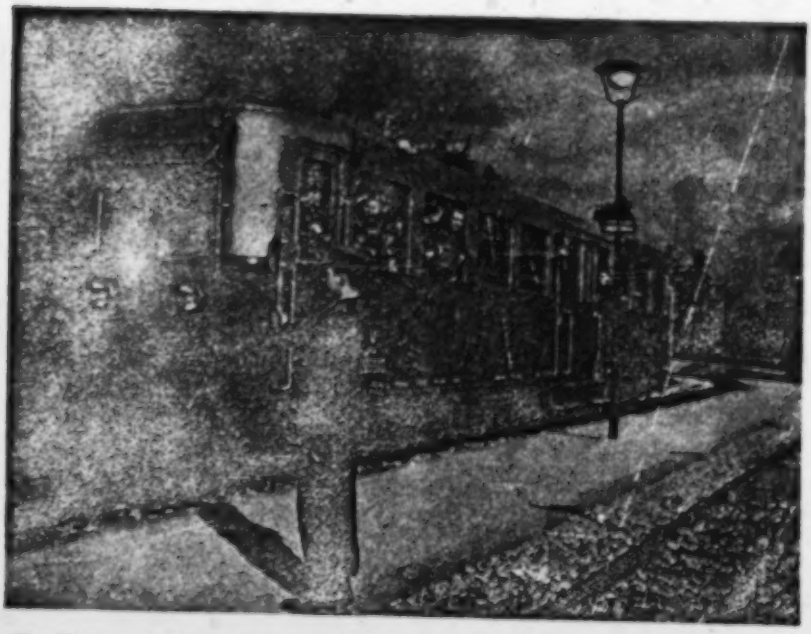
It gives you a wonderful feeling to know all this and

Ferenc Gergely and his son at a station of the Pioneer Railway chat with another young railroader.

It gives you a wonderful feeling to know all this and 837

to see day after day, how the people's state provides for the workers, for their wives and children. Ferenc Gergely has two children, Marika who is six years old and was born under the People's Democracy and Joska, who is thirteen and is in the seventh grade at elementary school. Joska is a pioneer; he spent two weeks at one of the pioneer camps last summer and he is now serving a period of about four weeks at the Pioneer Train.

The Pioneer Railway is the gift of the Hungarian People's 837
Democracy to the children. It rolls over eight miles, be- 529
tween Cool Valley and Liberty Hill, the most beautiful part of the capital. Every employee of the small railway is a pioneer. All are children: the conductors, the telegraphers, the station masters, the switch men and, naturally, the passengers. Or, rather, only part of the passengers, because the adults are just as fond as the children of this



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The Pioneer Railway is managed completely by children. It was given by the Hungarian People's Republic to the children of the country.

half service half game institution which teaches the children a sense of responsibility. The Pioneer Railway is one of the favorite amusements of the children and an interesting spot of the capital.

Joska is deeply attached to the Pioneer Railway; he has repeatedly stated that he will become a railway man. It must be said, however, that he has at least as many times asserted that he will be a turner. The boy is greatly attracted to machines: his dexterity is above average and his father knows that soon he will be an industrial apprentice.

Going for a morning stroll at a resort hotel on Mount Mecsek.

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Around seven o'clock Jozsef Magyar leaves. At the National Theatre they are playing Shakespeare's Hamlet; he has bought himself a ticket and now he must hurry so as to be on time. The National Theater is one of the largest theaters in the capital. Performances of contemporary, as well as classic plays have evoked so much interest in the theater among the people that there is rarely a performance that is not sold out. The fact, too, that the tickets are very inexpensive also contributes to the popularity of the entertainment medium. 545

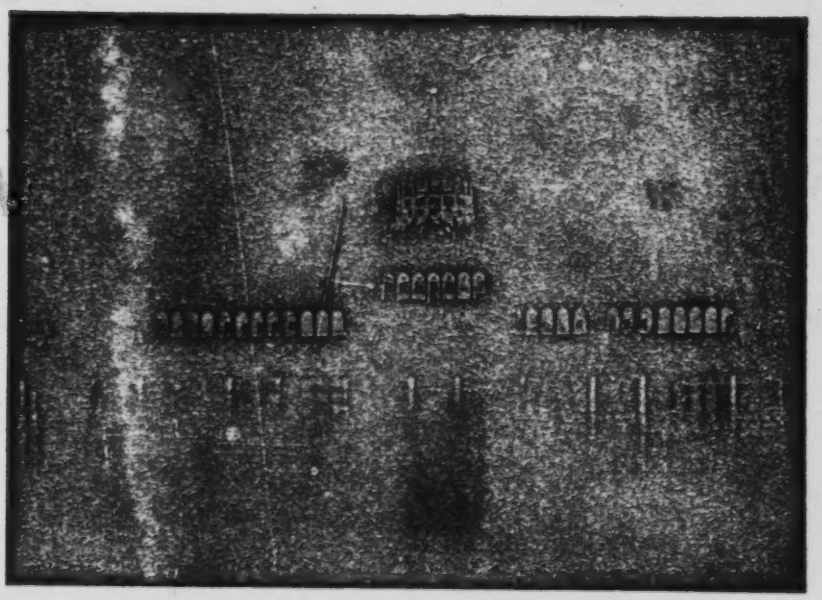
The Gergely family sits down to dinner. They too have plans for the evening: they and the children are going on a two-hour trip on the musical promenade-ship on the Danube . . . 529

After dinner they pick themselves up and walk out to 000

Scene from a performance of "Hamlet" at the National Theater in Budapest.

the river. It is a balmy evening. The soft, cool air, fresh on the Danube, blows across the city. There are many people on the streets, enjoying the sight of a fresh, clean city. Lights start popping on here and there and the fairy-like quality of all night scenes take hold of Ferenc Gergely and his wife. They take their places on the deck of the snowy white, beautifully illuminated ship. The orchestra is playing gay tunes, in the bow of the ship a merry vaudeville show entertains the public, and Ferenc Gergely and his wife stand at the railing watching the river and the town. Slowly the pulsating life of the illuminated capital, the rows of houses on the two shores, the towers and cupolas, the bridges and factory chimneys are left behind. The ship glides majestically in the middle of the stream. The Danube reminds one of an endless silver ribbon . . .

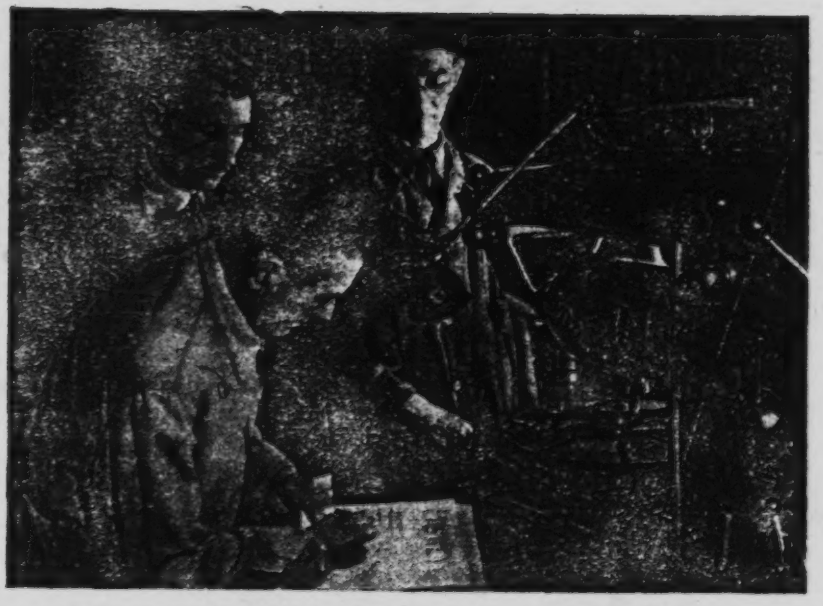
"It connects countries and peoples"—Ferenc Gergely says to his wife. He thinks of the common anxiety, common desires, common will of many countries, of



The Parliament at night reflected in the waters of the Danube.

hundreds of millions of human beings: to live in peace. Ferenc Gergely strives towards the same aim. He signed the peace appeal, works selflessly for the strengthening of the camp of peace and, together with the entire Hungarian people, he has pledged himself to peace, to a secure life, to constructive work. In his thoughts the silver ribbon becomes a symbol, the symbol of the friendship and peace of the working peoples of the world. He glances towards his merry, laughing children, squeezes his wife's arm, and, as if he were answering a question, says quietly but with determination:

"Yes. We work for peace and we shall protect it . . ."



Ferenc Gergely signs a peace petition circulated in his factory.